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CASEY SPARED TOP OFFICIALS DISCIPLINE FOR CONTRA MANUAL

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CIA Director William Casey chose not to punish two senior agency officials who authorized a 1984 manual urging Contra rebels to assassinate Nicaraguan community leaders, says Rep. Norman Mineta, D-Calif.< Since then, one of the pair has been linked to the U.S. arms deals with Iran.<

Disclosure of the CIA's publication of the Contra manual caused a stir during the 1984 presidential race, leading President Reagan to promise action would be taken against all agency officials involved in its preparation.<

Casey, who resigned last week while struggling to recover from brain-cancer surgery Dec. 18, disciplined five mid-level CIA officials for their roles in preparing the manual - imposing sanctions ranging from written reprimands to suspension without pay.<

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But he chose to take no action against two senior officials, Duane Clarridge and Ray Doty, though he had evidence they were responsible for planning and approving the manual, Mineta said. The congressman served on the House Intelligence Committee when the matter arose in late 1984.<

Casey told the intelligence panel in a closed session that he felt Clarridge and Doty should not be punished for what he considered a minor infraction after many years of service to the agency, Mineta said in a recent interview.<

"There's no reason to discipline them for one little slip-up," he quoted the former spy chief as saying.<

Details of Mineta's account were supported by an administration official and a second congressional source, who requested anonymity in interviews.<

Clarridge, in testimony to the intelligence panel two years ago, said he had acknowledged to the CIA inspector general's office he was "fully responsible" for the manual as chief of covert operations for Central America, Mineta said.<

But Casey asked the inspector general, who was probing which CIA employees were responsible for preparing the manual, not to name Clarridge in his classified November 1984 report, Mineta said.<

Casey made sure Clarridge was protected and that his name was not in the report," Mineta said. "Casey was his angel - they were very, very close."<

He said Casey also decided to disregard the recommendation of the inspector general that Doty, paramilitary chief for Latin America, be disciplined.<

Clarridge's role in a 1985 arms shipment to Iran now is being investigated by congressional committees looking into the Iran arms-Contra aid scandal.<

Clarridge, who was transferred to Europe after the manual controversy to take over covert operations there, helped Lt. Col. Oliver North of the National Security Council ship U.S. weapons to Iran in November 1985, according to the recently released Senate Intelligence Committee report on the scandal.<

The 90-page manual, "Psychological Operations in Guerrilla War," was in Spanish and advised rebels to kidnap and "neutralize selected (Nicaraguan) government officials" - a phrase understood by Contras to mean assassination.<

The manual also coached rebels to blackmail Nicaraguan citizens into joining the Contras, to hire criminals to carry out "selective jobs," and to arrange the deaths of rebel supporters so they would become "martyrs."<

Casey, recovering at Georgetown University Medical Center in Washington, defended the manual in a 1984 letter to members of Congress. He said its purpose was to make the rebels "persuasive in face-to-face communication" and that its stress was "on education, avoiding combat when necessary."<

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Neither Clarridge nor Doty could be reached for comment. CIA spokeswoman Sharon Foster said the agency does not comment on internal affairs or questions about the manual. <